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ABSTRACT

Drawing from the experiences of South Carolina's Midlands Technical College (MTC), this paper offers guidelines for operationalizing institutional effectiveness and presents selected findings from MTC's efforts to assess institutional outcomes. The first section defines institutional effectiveness in terms of planning (i.e., a process documenting the intended purpose, direction, and expected outcomes of the college and providing foresight for policy formation and program development) and evaluation (i.e., a systematic process of measuring the college against its stated purpose and indicators of effectiveness in terms of accomplished outcomes). The next section identifies critical success factors, including accessible, comprehensive, high-quality programs; student satisfaction and retention; post-education satisfaction and success; economic development and community involvement; sound resource management; and dynamic organizational involvement and development. Indicators of effectiveness related to these areas are also presented. After summarizing MTC's method for operationalizing institutional effectiveness, the paper describes MTC's academic program assessment system, and efforts to build student success and college effectiveness through retention tracking. Findings from these studies and the methods used to communicate results of effectiveness measures within the college are also reviewed. The concluding section summarizes the seven steps in MTC's operationalization of institutional effectiveness and offers recommendations for implementing a similar process at other institutions. (JMC)

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INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT: MAKING ASSESSMENT WORK FOR YOU

Third Annual Effectiveness and Student Success Conference

Greensboro, North Carolina

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Midlands Technical College

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INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT: MAKING ASSESSMENT WORK FOR YOU

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Institutional effectiveness is one of the hottest topics in postsecondary education today. There are numerous reasons for the interest now being shown in effectiveness and accountability. Several national task force reports in the 1980s reported a declining confidence in the value of a college degree. Business and industry report that our nation's high school and college graduates' educational and occupational skills, relative to their counterparts in other countries, are deteriorating.

South Carolina did not wait for a national mandate to legislate effectiveness activities. In June 1988, South Carolina Governor Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. signed into law Act 629, known as the "Cutting Edge" legislation, making it mandatory that South Carolina colleges maintain effective systems of quality assessment and accountability to: (1) determine institutional effectiveness; (2) disseminate the results of outcomes to constituents within the state; and (3) initiate changes in curriculum, programs and policy based on data related to institutional effectiveness.

Sensing the importance of effectiveness activities such as planning and evaluation to overall college improvement, the faculty, staff and Commission of Midlands Technical College (MTC) demonstrated their commitment to accountability in the fall of 1986 by initiating a strategic planning process that produced the *Vision of Excellence*, a document outlining the commitment of the college to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. To assure translation of the *Vision* into reality, the college launched a comprehensive institutional effectiveness initiative in 1988 that goes beyond South Carolina's mandated requirements.

Midlands Technical College has made a major commitment to institutional effectiveness college-wide, with the adoption of a multi-dimensional Institutional Effectiveness Program, in which student outcomes assessment plays a key role in overall assessment methodology. In 1989-90, Midlands Technical College was designated as the lead institution for institutional effectiveness among South Carolina's two-year technical/community colleges. From 1988-90, the college received funding from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education to develop a model academic program assessment system and to provide leadership for faculty development, evaluation of developmental education programs and dissemination of exemplary methodologies, products and practices in instruction. The college also received a grant from AACJC and the Kellogg Foundation in 1990 to serve as a Beacon College for the development and replication of assessment methodologies and the development of institutional effectiveness programs throughout South Carolina's technical/community colleges.

To disseminate state and national assessment efforts, the college has initiated the publication of *IE in Focus*, a quarterly newsletter on institutional effectiveness funded through the Beacon College project and distributed to over 1200 two-year colleges nationwide.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS DEFINED

Institutional effectiveness, as it is understood at Midlands Technical College, is more than a synonym for program evaluation or assessment of student outcomes. It is an institutional perspective that focuses on accurate planning, assessment of accomplishments (both of students and the college's overall effectiveness) and the use of assessment results for planning and decision-making. Thus, the college's definition of institutional effectiveness has two major components: planning and evaluation. (see page 3) Within the context of the college's institutional effectiveness program, planning and evaluation are defined as:

> **Planning**: a process which documents the intended purpose, direction and expected outcomes of the college and provides foresight for formulating policies, programs and services.
>
> **Evaluation**: A systematic process of measuring the college against its stated purpose and indicators of effectiveness, in terms of outcomes accomplished.

Planning

Planning at Midlands Technical College is composed of a strategic planning cycle and a complementary operational planning cycle. **Strategic planning** establishes the essential major directions for the college that have been determined in response to the assessment of the needs of the Central Midlands community, our students, the faculty and staff and the results of the evaluation component of the institutional effectiveness program. The strategic planning process is conducted in two-year cycles, beginning in January and ending in July.

Operational planning is an ongoing annual process at the college that provides the details for translating the college's priority initiatives into actions. In the spring, each department of the college develops a set of annual objectives for the next fiscal year, beginning on July 1. The department or unit's objectives and action plans, presented on page 4, are reviewed by the appropriate vice president or director to ensure that objectives and action plans correlate with the college's goals and priority initiatives.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS PROGRAM
Planning
Evaluation
Strategic
Operational
Institutional Goals
Critical Success Factors

1991-92 ANNUAL OBJECTIVES
ACTION PLAN

Division/Department: _____ **Date:** _____

Institutional Goal/Priority Initiative:

1991-92 Objective:

1. List the actions/implementation procedures necessary to accomplish this objective, with anticipated beginning and completion dates.

2. Identify specific resources required to carry out the action plan.

3. Specify the measurement criteria and anticipated outcomes you will use to measure your success in achieving this objective.

4. Indicate any other divisions/programs that will be directly affected by this action plan and how the coordination between/among programs will be accomplished.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a college-wide commitment to ongoing process and product review. Coordinated by the Executive Staff and supported by an internal institutional effectiveness committee, evaluation is implemented in the appropriate units or departments.

The college's annual progress in achieving its stated institutional goals and priority new initiatives continues to be a major component of the evaluation program. Each July, members of the President's Executive Staff review the results of activities undertaken in support of the new initiatives during the past school year. A summative evaluation of the college's performance is then presented to the Board of Trustees at their annual retreat in August. This report includes an Institutional Effectiveness Report Card that provides quantitative and qualitative information on the college's progress against identified standards of excellence, as well as information on the college's annual objectives.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

As the new emphasis on planning and evaluation evolved from 1987 to 1989, the college's administrators realized that focusing evaluation on long range goals and annual objectives was not providing a complete picture of the college's overall effectiveness. The long-range goals and annual objectives dealt with new initiatives, but no mechanism was in place to systematically assess ongoing college programs and services. The college's administration decided they needed a set of criteria that would answer the question, "How effective is our institution in providing ongoing programs and services that encourage student success and support our mission?"

After a review of several national models, including a model developed by the Sloan School of Business at MIT and DeAnza College's adaptation of that model, the college determined that the six broad performance characteristics listed below are of paramount importance to the ultimate success of the college and its students.

- Accessible, Comprehensive Programs of High Quality
- Student Satisfaction and Retention
- Post Education Satisfaction and Success
- Economic Development and Community Involvement
- Sound, Effective Resource Management
- Dynamic Organizational Involvement and Development

These six performance characteristics are called **Critical Success Factors**. As defined by DeAnza College, Critical Success Factors are "The key things that must go right for the organization to flourish and achieve its goals." A definition of each Critical Success Factor follows.

Accessible, Comprehensive Programs of High Quality - The first major determinant of the college's effectiveness is a strong academic curriculum. It should provide opportunities for access to the college, while monitoring placement within an individual program based upon a student's projected likelihood of success. It should be comprehensive, with quality instruction and support services that prepare the student to successfully transfer to a senior institution or enter the workplace.

Student Satisfaction and Retention - Students are the college's number one clients and products. Retention of students to goal completion is critical to accomplishing the college's Mission. Their satisfaction with the academic programs, support services, facilities and extra-curricular opportunities directly affect their retention.

Post Education Satisfaction and Success - Employment preparation and transfer success are two dimensions of the college's mission that must be successful for the college to consider itself effective. In-field placement rates of graduates and transfer students' GPAs should reflect the extent to which the college has effectively prepared students for post education success.

Economic Development and Community Involvement - For Midlands Technical College to truly be a community college, its programs, services and students must contribute to the community the college serves. The college supports economic development through the appropriate education and training of entry-level workers and the retraining of current employees, based on local business and industry demands. In addition, as a community college, Midlands' faculty and staff are encouraged to become actively involved in the community and to host community groups on campus.

Sound, Effective Resource Management - In order to be effective,the college must be fiscally responsible to the citizens and students who provide its resources. This includes adequate and equitable distribution of funds, appropriate use of personnel and facilities and support of the college by both public and private entities.

Dynamic Organizational Involvement and Development - The faculty and staff who work at Midlands Technical College are its most valuable resources. Their ongoing professional development and enthusiasm for the *Vision of Excellence* measurably affects the college's effectiveness in serving students. The college will provide professional development opportunities, be a proactive supporter of affirmative action and support equitable salaries for all employees.

Indicators of Effectiveness

In order to monitor and measure how well the college is performing relative to each Critical Success Factor, Indicators of Effectiveness and a set of measurable criteria are being developed for each factor. The indicators and their supporting measurement criteria are the observed, quantified and qualified results of performance. They provide a structure and a mechanism for organizing the review and evaluation of MTC's effectiveness in key areas. A matrix of the Critical Success Factors and Indicators of Effectiveness is presented on page 8.

In determining the Indicators of Effectiveness and their corresponding criteria, two key questions were asked:

What do we want the results of our college's effectiveness to be?

What specific evidence are we willing to accept that the results have actually been achieved?

A draft set of measurement criteria have been developed for each indicator. The measurement criteria vary. Some are based on comparison of MTC's performance to the performance of other colleges in the state's technical college system or the nation that are of similar size and have similar missions. However, the college is being very selective in the use of norms or comparative data due to the uniqueness of the college's service population. Past performance or internal trend studies are used as data become available. The Critical Success Factors and supporting Indicators of Effectiveness are reviewed annually in July to provide information on the college's overall effectiveness.

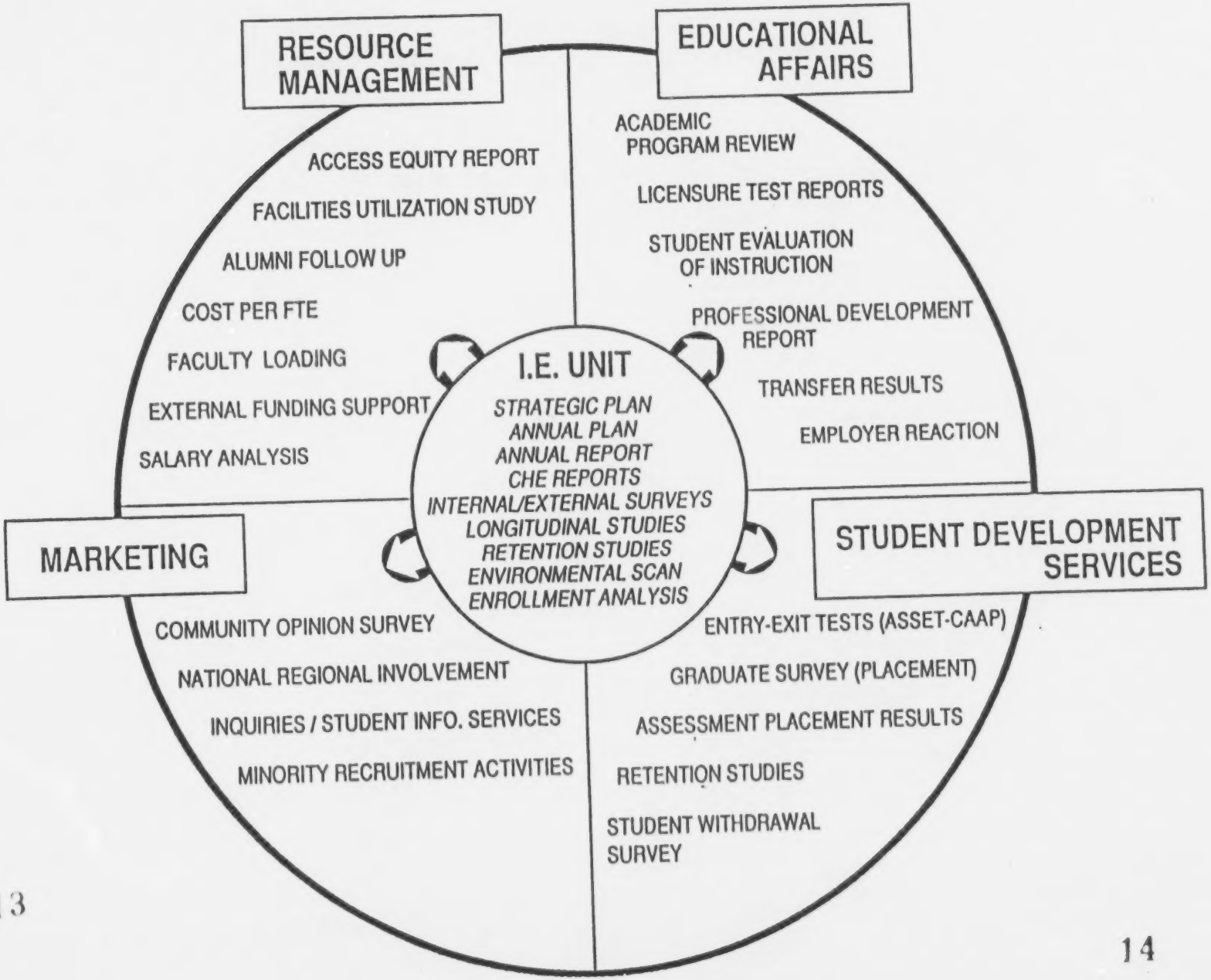
Much of the data and standards needed to report on all indicators are still being collected or developed. When information and data are available, and actions have been taken based upon their review, those actions are reported. Where superior performance is demonstrated, effectiveness is assumed. If less than satisfactory performance is indicated, corrective action(s) are taken.

OPERATIONALIZING INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

In 1989, in order to provide an administrative structure for the institutional effectiveness program, the President formed an Institutional Effectiveness Unit, named an Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, and created an internal Institutional Effectiveness Committee. However, the collection of information that will provide the data needed to determine the college's performance against a given standard is not assigned to a single person or unit. Assessment studies and data collection has been decentralized and delegated to the division or department with the best access to the information or with the knowledge, staff or resources to conduct the data gathering activity. As the diagram on page 9 illustrates, all divisions of the college are involved in assessment activities, with the Institutional Effectiveness Unit providing coordination and tracking of assessment activities to avoid duplication of efforts.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS
AND
INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS

-A- Accessible, Comprehensive Programs of High Quality	A-1 Access and Equity	A-2 General Education	A-3 Academic Assessment of Program Major	A-4 Articulations/ Transfer
-B- Student Satisfaction and Retention	B-1 Entering Student Assessment and Course Placement	B-2 Achievement of Students' Goals	B-3 Satisfaction with Instruction	B-4 Assessment of Student Services
-C- Post Education Satisfaction and Success	C-1 Graduate Employment/ Cont. Education Rates	C-2 Employer Satisfaction with Graduates	C-3 Graduate's Satisfaction with Education/Training	
-D- Economic Development and Community Involvement	D-1 Industry Training Related to Economic Development	D-2 Positive Community/ College Interaction	D-3 Alumni Support and Involvement	
-E- Sound, Effective Resource Management	E-1 Distribution of Resources	E-2 Facility Adequacy, Use, and Condition	E-3 Acquisition of Public/Private Resources	
-F- Dynamic Organizational Involvement and Development	F-1 Ongoing Professional Development of Faculty and Staff	F-2 Affirmative Action Plan	F-3 Faculty/Staff Salary Equity	


RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
ACCESS EQUITY REPORT
FACILITIES UTILIZATION STUDY
ALUMNI FOLLOW UP
COST PER FTE
FACULTY LOADING
EXTERNAL FUNDING SUPPORT
SALARY ANALYSIS
EDUCATIONAL AFFAIRS
ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW
LICENSURE TEST REPORTS
STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REPORT
TRANSFER RESULTS
EMPLOYER REACTION
I.E. UNIT
STRATEGIC PLAN
ANNUAL PLAN
ANNUAL REPORT
CHE REPORTS
INTERNAL/EXTERNAL SURVEYS
LONGITUDINAL STUDIES
RETENTION STUDIES
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN
ENROLLMENT ANALYSIS
MARKETING
COMMUNITY OPINION SURVEY
NATIONAL REGIONAL INVOLVEMENT
INQUIRIES / STUDENT INFO. SERVICES
MINORITY RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
ENTRY-EXIT TESTS (ASSET-CAAP)
GRADUATE SURVEY (PLACEMENT)
ASSESSMENT PLACEMENT RESULTS
RETENTION STUDIES
STUDENT WITHDRAWAL SURVEY

As Midlands Technical College's institutional effectiveness program has evolved, several major assessment and effectiveness projects have been implemented that will generate extensive information on college performance in the coming years. Examples of several processes and projects currently underway at MTC are summarized below.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Assessing The Major - What We've Learned

After three years of piloting various methods to assess student outcomes, Midlands Technical College has developed a multi-faceted approach to assessing the effects of academic instruction. The success of students in their chosen major is the focus of our efforts.

The assessment is conducted from a variety of perspectives: those of students, graduates, advisory committee members, employers, faculty and administration. The process assesses effectiveness using a mixture of success indicators such as enrollment, retention, program completion, job placement, program capstone competencies, external reviewers, exit tests, student technical skills, developmental/ remediation programs and employer/student/graduate satisfaction.

Since 1988, the college has reviewed one-half of the academic programs, improved data collection and analysis, held DACUMS (Developing A Curriculum) in 60 percent of the majors, adopted a series of Program Outcomes and Standards and adopted a General Education Core. In order to manage the process of looking at each major, the following list of activities has been developed to guide faculty in reviewing their programs:

1. DACUM planned, scheduled and held if needed.
2. DACUM results shared with VPEA/Dean/Department chairperson.
3. Follow-up course/curriculum development begun as needed.
4. Evaluation strategies and methods determined to verify if competencies have been achieved.
5. Program evaluation data needs identified/surveys mailed/data collected and analyzed.
6. Program standards/criteria achievement reviewed and finalized.
7. Program Effectiveness Manual completed/sent to VPEA/Dean with recommendations.
8. Program modification as needed/action plan in place.
9. Progress report of evaluation results and follow-up action taken.

Using this approach has resulted in a "working list" of performance standards and some exciting results. "Major" has been defined as an organized group of courses which, together with support and/or general education courses, constitute a full program of study leading to an associate degree. The assessment of the academic major determines the degree to which students master specialized knowledge and skills leading to employment in their field or discipline and/or success in a transfer senior-level program. All programs undergo an internal review at least every five years. Programs undergoing the internal review are evaluated holistically, with recommendations made for continued improvement.

Performance standards used to date include:

- Student success on required licensure exams will exceed the national (or state) average by at least 10 percent.
- The percentage of any survey group evaluating an academic major as satisfactory or better will equal or exceed 90 percent.
- Average section size by discipline will not vary more than + or - 5 percent from established standards.
- Faculty loads by department will not vary more than + or - 5 percent from established standards.
- Additional student performance standards by program majors to be developed in 1991-92. Data sources used in the process include licensing reports, employer surveys, student graduate surveys, program FTE, placement rates, retention data and faculty professional activities.

In order to organize assessment activities, tasks were divided into three areas: measuring learning outcomes, measuring client satisfaction and measuring program efficiency. Learning outcomes focused on goal attainment and mastery of core competencies. Client satisfaction was measured with surveys to alumni, employers and current students. Program efficiency measures included standard data such as headcount, section size, etc. The results to date have given cause for both celebration and change. A few examples of these assessment results are described below.

In the area of developmental (DVS) writing, the college set a goal of DVS students performing as well as ENG 100 as non-DVS students. Tracking of over 400 students from DVS English to ENG 100 revealed that 83 percent made a "C" or better, compared with "C" or better performance for 85 percent of the students who were placed directly into ENG 100. Overall, the DVS writing program appeared to be working, but detailed analyses revealed specific areas of weakness for DVS students. As a result, changes have been made in the curriculum to strengthen these skills areas.

Another example is the performance of students in the Court Reporting Program, where graduates must be able to achieve a specified goal in speed typing and transcription. As a target, the college set as an outcome standard that 90 percent of the students taking a capstone demonstration exam will earn a "C" or better. Results showed the pass rate on average after three attempts to be 63 percent, far from our goal. This assessment resulted in several changes in retention efforts and the inclusion of a speed building lab during the senior term.

The primary focus of all academic program assessment has been to discern what and how well students are learning and to make improvements based on this knowledge. A vibrant and on-going academic assessment and planning process has been the result.

BUILDING STUDENT SUCCESS AND COLLEGE EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH RETENTION TRACKING

To assess college effectiveness in the area of "student satisfaction and retention", a student tracking system and a series of retention reports have been developed under a Title III Strengthening Institutions grant to (1) give information to college program managers for use in improving programs and services; (2) provide the college with a barometer of effectiveness; and (3) ultimately enhance student success in obtaining their educational goals. The retention reporting system has been developed so that matrices of student characteristics and enrollment information can be analyzed to yield profiles of continuing students, graduates and leavers by a variety of variables that are useful in planning program improvements and interventions.

Methodology

The effort to support the retrieval of retention information began in Fall 1988 with the development of a DBASE III PLUS program written by the Office of Research and Analysis. The intent of this effort was to create a workable, programmable format prior to programming the college database. This first program served as the basis for discussions for identifying how students would be tracked. Several decisions were reached with the concurrence of academic, student development and programming personnel, with input from a college-wide retention task force and other interested members of the college community.

First, retention data would focus only on first-time entering students to Midlands Technical College and reports would be designed to facilitate the tracking of individual students within the cohort group for each term. Entering students would be grouped by three categories: (1) students taking only developmental courses; (2) students taking a combination of developmental and college-level curriculum courses; and (3) students taking only college-level curriculum courses.

Second, the reports would allow the review of student attrition during and between terms. These reports would also have the capability of tracking a cohort of students over multiple enrollment periods. For example, the progress of students enrolling in Fall 1988 could be followed through their enrollment in Fall 1989 or longer.

Third, two types of reports would be developed. The first would retrieve individual student data based upon the changing goals of the student. This would enable the detailed examination of an individual student's progress based upon stated/desired goals. Student goal information would be updated each term during the registration process. The second, an aggregate report, would provide student retention information for the college population and for each academic program. Included in the aggregate report would be student data grouped by three categories mentioned earlier. This report would also provide race, sex, age, and GPA data and would indicate the numbers of students who continued their studies, changed majors, graduated, or dropped during the period under study. Additionally, data would be provided by campus, for full-time/part-time enrollment, and enrollment in day or evening classes. Phase I of the programming to produce this information has been completed and the college is currently exploring data needs to outline programming that will occur in Phase II of the project.

Findings

Initial findings revealed a freshman to sophomore retention rate of 47.6 percent for the Fall 1988 entering student cohort tracked to Fall 1989. Additional research indicated that attrition of entering students was a problem area. To address this concern the college focused efforts on the development of an integrated student assessment/orientation/advisement system that included development of student educational plans at entry, success seminars for entering students, new student advisement centers, faculty training in developmental academic advisement and a college-wide customer service training plan. In 1989 the college obtained Title III funding to support these efforts and began implementation of an integrated "Student Success System" focused on entering students. A comprehensive student tracking and retention reporting system was developed to track students and assess the effectiveness of these interventions.

Freshman to Sophomore retention data on the Fall 1989 entering student cohort tracked to Fall 1990 showed a 52.3 percent retention rate, a 4.7 percent increase over the previous year's group and on par with the 52.3 percent freshman to sophomore retention rate for public two-year colleges reported in the 1990 ACT College Data File.

The variability of the retention reporting system provides tracking of diverse student groups. To assess college progress toward a major college goal, educational accessibility and success for diverse student populations, the retention rates of ethnic groups entering at different points in time are compared. Freshman to sophomore retention comparisons by ethnic groups showed a significant increase in minority student retention for the Fall 1989 cohort when compared with the Fall 1988 cohort. Furthermore, the difference in the retention of minority and non-minority groups narrowed from a 4.1 percent difference in the 1988 cohort to a 3.0 percent difference in the 1989 group. The greatest increase in retention rates occurred in the black female population. Although the retention rates of the black male group increased, it remained the lowest of any ethnic sub-population and will be a focus of future interventions.

The retention data yielded via cohort tracking has provided Midlands Technical College with information to validate the effectiveness of current retention improvement initiatives and to make decisions regarding future interventions. Retention reports that allow analysis by multiple variables provide the college with valuable tools by which to evaluate its effectiveness and engage in improvement efforts to enhance the success of its students.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVENESS RESULTS

As the college's assessment activities began to become fully operational, it became evident that mechanisms and processes needed to be implemented to ensure monitoring, communication and follow-up of assessment and effectiveness projects. All units of the college were surveyed to determine what assessment/effectiveness activities would be occurring each month. An assessment calendar was developed in fall 1990 to track assessment activities and avoid conflicts in scheduling or reporting.

In addition to the assessment calendar, six Executive Staff meetings per year have been allocated for assessment forums. The assessment forums are open to all faculty and staff and provide a mechanism for discussion of assessment data and the use of such data for improving programs and services. After each forum, an internal newsletter, entitled *Focus on Effectiveness,* is distributed to all employees. The internal newsletter highlights the report given at the assessment forum and communicates upcoming assessment/effectiveness activities.

Midlands Technical College has determined that institutional effectiveness activities will become routine throughout the college and that they will keep the college focused on its students and its *Vision for Excellence.* In responding to these policy issues and implementing a college-wide institutional effective program, the College is ensuring that those making decisions on the future of the college and its programs and services make their decisions based upon the best information available. The college is convinced the institutional effectiveness process improves teaching and learning, resulting in the desired institutional effectiveness product—student success.

SUMMARY

In operationalizing Institutional Effectiveness, Midlands Technical College followed these seven basic steps:

1. articulated its mission;
2. established a planning mechanism;
3. developed an evaluation system that tells us if "we are what we say we are";
4. identified critical areas of success;
5. established priority standards upon which we will judge our effectiveness in the critical areas;
6. determined mechanisms for documenting if we met our established standards:
   - hard data (enrollment reports, licensure test results, transfers' grades, assessment of majors, etc.)
   - surveys (written, telephone, interviews)
   - peer reviews; and
7. utilized results of assessment for decision making

Institutional effectiveness, assessment, outcomes studies — whatever your evaluationefforts are called — are forces to be reckoned with in the 1990s. It is time we came to termswith their roles in the community college and got on with the job in organizing, implementingand monitoring the way we do business. A few closing points may help focus your efforts.

In implementing institutional effectiveness:

1. Secure support from top leadership. Keep key administrators informed and involved.
2. Decide what questions about student learning and the college's programs and services you want answered. Remember you can't assess everything that moves.
3. Assess where you are and what you are currently doing first. Build on what is already being done. Develop a "doable" program for your institution.
4. Review, study, look at what others have done (don't worry about reinventing the wheel).
5. Develop and/or obtain technical expertise, if needed.
6. Organize your effectiveness/assessment efforts. Encourage involvement at all levels. Develop collaborative efforts and data-gathering processes.
7. Determine how you will measure effectiveness and use creditable research methods and multiple measures. Quality assessment is more important than quantity.
8. Focus on outcomes, performance and use of results. Follow-up to ensure results produce change.

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